



December 19, 2010

Dear Secretary of the Standing Committee on Regional Australia,

We are Michael Stewardson, Senior Lecturer in Hydrology and Water Resources, Melbourne School of Engineering, The University of Melbourne and Edward Maltby, Professor of Wetland Science, Water & Ecosystem Management, & Director Institute for Sustainable Water, Integrated Management & Ecosystem Research, University of Liverpool, UK. Dr. Stewardson has extensive research and practical experience in environmental water management in Australia. Professor Maltby has particular experience in providing technical support to the development and implementation of International Conventions relevant to water.

This submission addresses the impact of the Basin Plan with reference to both the direct and indirect impact of the Proposed Basin Plan on regional communities.

We wish to point out that the second objective of the Commonwealth Water Act 2007 is to give effect to relevant international agreements. Two such agreements are the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention). Australia is signatory of both Conventions and both require societal choice in balancing conservation and use of natural ecosystems. The CBD has three key objectives: conservation of biodiversity; sustainable use; equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. The Ramsar Convention requires "wise use" of wetlands throughout the territorial limits of the Contracting Party. This is defined as "the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development". Both international agreements cite the '*ecosystem approach*' as the methodological framework for the attainment of the appropriate balance between the conservation and use of land, water and living resources. With this in mind, the terms of this inquiry is entirely consistent with Australia's international commitments, which underpin the Water Act 2007.

It is unfortunate that the public debate over the Basin Planning process has become polarized between water for the environment vs. water for economic and social benefit. These international agreements, and common sense, demand that we consider the wider benefits derived from water in the basin in deciding on how much should be available for particular sectors. The larger picture includes not only food production and biodiversity protection but also human health and safety, water quality, flood control, tourism, education and many other ecosystem services affected by water management.

Whilst biodiversity is an insurance policy against the potentially disastrous consequences of climate change, recovery and maintenance of a satisfactory hydrological regime in the Basin is essential to underpin the well-being of regional communities both within the Basin as well as outside.

The *Ecosystem Approach* is underpinned by clear principles that reflect the importance not only of societal choice and the need to internalize economic distortions but also to include knowledge from all sectors and disciplines and to ensure a sound scientific evidence base. In particular, managers must have regard to the significance of their actions on adjacent and other ecosystems. This is particularly relevant to the potential impacts of land / water management on downstream environmental assets and socio-economics.

We should be pleased to elaborate further the principles of the *ecosystem approach*, its relevance in delivering on important International Conventions and in assisting Australia in demonstrating a global leadership role in integrated river basin management.

Regards

on behalf of

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